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Reading Reflections

FIAE Chapter 1

The major premise of the book seems to focus on being fair but not equal. If we taught every student equally some would do better and some worse and some average just because of their different learning styles and needs. The teacher is expected to provide each student with a fair chance of completing the required work even if it differs from student to student. I thought it was interesting that the book talked about how many of the sentences that we start with today (concerning scientific knowledge or understanding) is what is currently known now. This book leaves the possibility open that changes will occur in our understanding of how the brain works and that teachers should adapt accordingly. This impacts me because in addition to understanding how the brain learns, I need to know how to effectively use my resources to help each student learn what they need to complete the class goals. The comment that the book makes about differentiated teaching helps the student understand how they learn. This could be an important area to explore in the classroom is getting the students involved and asking how they think they would learn best. The result would be open communication between student and teacher and provide more effective ways of learning and teaching. The discussion of how the real world is as differentiated as the classroom should be is fascinating. I hope to integrate that into the classroom by pointing it out to students. This way they can see the different strategies and supports that are put in place to better help their learning.

FIAE Chapter 2

Chapter 2 discusses the primary difference between mastery and understanding. According to the book, a student can have understanding of the content but have difficulty putting it into practice because they have not mastered the practical application. FIAE explains that a student might be able to recite multiples of nine up to twelve but be unable to solve a complex math problem that has multiple levels of addition, subtraction and multiplication. This discussion of mastery ties in with having multiple assessments. Just because I can answer a multiple choice question does not accurately test my mastery of the history of the US. This chapter brings into perspective making sure my students will be able to use the knowledge that I teach them effectively in the real world. The chapter also talks about expanding the knowledge and understanding that comes from a goal. As a teacher I should be able to expand on the benchmarks or standards that are provided for my subject. The book provides the examples of recognizing context clues, identifying author’s purpose, and using background information to make sense of new material. Though these are only useful for some topics, the concept will be critical to use in all of the benchmarks and standards that I will need the students to master. The closing of the chapter focuses on teachers keeping their minds open to new ways of teaching or perspectives over the material being worked on. A teacher should never limit his lectures or projects to his own knowledge and should be open to the different ways a student learns the material or has learned the material.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 begins by making the point that students come into the classroom biased as to how they learn and perceive information. The author makes the point that splitting students into groups is critical beyond interrupting the mundane classroom routine. This impacts me because I should be aware how students work together and how they can benefit from different groupings. Incorporating EEK and KUD into my classroom will be important because it follows the idea of the last few chapters. Students should know the subject, understand the subject and be able to practically use the information they have learned. Pre-assessment is important for finding the goals that I would need to teach in the classroom. The book describes a summative assessment which reflects all that we deem important to know for the class and are given at the end of the lesson. This assessment is used for the teacher to check for understanding but also for the student to put into perspective the material they have learned and connect it to issues and problems. The formative assessment is used to check the status of a student’s learning throughout the semester and to make sure they are hitting important checkpoints. One comment in the reading is that the students should not have adult level proficiency with the material in the class. I feel this impacts me because while I would expect the best out of my students, I should not expect all of them to master the course material completely by the end of the semester.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 discusses different ways of assigning or managing work in the classroom. The portfolio is an option to use and has the benefit of getting students to look over their work a second (or greater) time. In addition it provides the teacher with a bigger picture of a student’s productivity and learning. The reading impacted me because it described the broad range of possibilities in using portfolios in the classroom. I have only completed two portfolios in my life but both have provided a great representation of how I did in the class. The portfolios also provide a detailed and quick way to look back or reference the information I learned throughout the year. The chapter also details how to set up and use a rubric in the class. I had not realized the detail required in creating a functional and helpful rubric. I know in science the procedure section of my lab report was supposed to be a step by step process for people to accomplish the same exact experiment. I see the rubric along similar lines but to explain to each student in no uncertain terms how to complete the assignment. Similar to portfolio the student self-assessment seems like a great way to get students to look over their work again rather than just turn in and forget. The wide variety of self-assessment makes integrating it into the classroom doable and easy. The basic ones like self-checklist and reading notations are just several ways to get students to look over their work once it is given back to them.

Chapter 5

For chapter 5, tiering is discussed as a simple way of increasing complexity as well as managing student different levels of skill. The author cautions that we do not always need to tier subjects and that it is critical to focus on only one aspect of the learning for each tier. For me that puts in perspective the point of higher and lower tiers. The lower tiers do not mean just “easy” or “basic” they are foundational work that can be advanced upon step by step. The author brought up an interesting idea of including the students in what levels of the tier they want to work on and the parameters of that tier. The teacher also has the possibility of providing multiple formats or choices along each tier to give the students more to work with. This could be helpful in the classroom as student feedback would gage how quickly they are moving along the tiers or how the succession of tiers need to be slowed down for them to catch up. Learning menus seemed like an amazing idea. The teacher would give the students a number of potential tasks to be completed. The students would then be able to pick and choose the projects or assignments they wanted to work on and complete by a certain date. The learning menus seem like a great idea for students who like to know what work they need to complete in advance and can plan accordingly. I am curious to see whether or not students who need continuous due dates would find the menus difficult to accomplish.

Chapter 6

I thought it was an interesting point the book made about the value of multiple choice questions. I have often second guessed some of the answers on the multiple-choice quiz the same way Raul did. The chapter does a good job describing ways to remove the biased answers that can sometimes occur with multiple-choice such as asking students to apply the information they have learned rather than just repeating the information back. This may have to do with the difference between a test and essay but some of the suggestions that the chapter gives include putting specific detail into a prompt with the hope that it will focus the test-taker’s attention and answer the prompt accordingly. Some of what we talked about in class involves giving the clipboards clear directive prompts but allowing the beach balls free reign to be creative. The chapter appears to go against that in the reading but it may be more of a case by case basis that the descriptive essay would be required. Most of the rest of the chapter involves making a test efficient. A test maker does not want to ask for more than is needed, what is not relevant, or to place too much of the grade on one big test. This chapter will be a good one to keep around because it helps refine the test I would want to give future students. The idea of using student names in questions a unique way of creating a test that I have not seen in a classroom. Having students write the answers down two different times so they can look at their answers after the test was a strategy that I think is a good idea and have seen used before.

Chapter 6 Abstract and Synthesis

**Abstract:**

If you are a teacher looking for a strategy on how to create good test questions look no further. Chapter 6 in *Fair Isn't Always Equal* provides a good start to making those test questions assess student learning rather than fill up the grade book with zeros. The critical points of the chapter stress using a variety of questions rather than just one type (ex. multiple choice, true-false, open ended questions, etc.) Other [strategies](http://cte.illinois.edu/testing/exam/test_ques.html) include avoiding negatives to prevent confusion in tests, have students write the answers twice so they have a copy of them after the test, and put some fun into the questions by using student names or real world issues. Like many of the other readings, Rick Wormeli encourages a wide spread of assessment rather than just a single test or big essay question. The most helpful form of assessment would be to have smaller tests spread throughout the semester.

**Synthesis:**

As a class, most of us picked up on differentiating tests to make it available to each student. The amount of panic that courses through students poor bodies at the prospect of a test might be just enough to blow up a small moon. Do teachers really need to add any fuel to that fire? Matt Potter disagrees, "Clear, concise test are essential for our students because, it will allow for [less stress, and confusion](http://www.testtakingtips.com/)." Tests should be something for students to show off their knowledge, understanding and mastery of the material covered in class. As teachers we want everyone to get A's and there should be no reason for us to help them along to a failing grade.  
Tyler Michaud has become the star child of education with is comment: "The goal when assessing students is to gain insight into their level of mastery, it is not logical to create questions that could trip the students up with awkward wording, rather creating concise and clear questions will yield the most accurate results." No matter how fun it can be to trick children soon to be half our age, our goal as a teacher is to help them aspire to greatness. The Emperor from *Star Wars* tricked young Anakin on the Jedi test and it did not turn out so well. If we do not want to train a whole bunch of mini Vaders I think we should follow Tyler and Wormeili's example in creating clearly worded test questions.  
  
On a final note, Ashley Godbout questions Wormeli's suggestion of using an answer sheet to make grading more efficient and use less paper. Though Ashley is disagreeing with the author, she is still actively following the role of a teacher to explore all methods of teaching. Wormeli, no matter the skill of his writing, could not convey the golden method of designing test questions. It is up to us as teachers and leaders to explore multiple methods and not just narrow our focus to one person's opinion.